

## Immigration Services Vital Part of Multidisciplinary Law Student Clinic

[by Erica Winter]

When law students in the La Raza organization first had the idea to launch a legal clinic at Santa Clara University School of Law in Santa Clara, CA, they wanted to help local workers in a wage dispute. As they started the volunteer work that would later become the Katharine & George Alexander Community Law Center, students and professors soon realized that they needed to add immigration legal services to the mix.

There are many law students working at the center now in all areas of its legal services, including workers' compensation and consumer rights. We chose to profile a few of those working in the clinical immigration programs—third-year Kirsten Bowman and second-years Angela Lytton and John Nguyen—to illustrate the center's work.

In helping to form the clinical immigration services offered at the center, Professor Lynette Parker, supervising attorney for immigration, looked at local services already being offered in the Santa Clara area. As a result, asylum cases, in which returning to a home country could mean persecution or death for a client, make up the majority of the center's cases.

Kirsten Bowman looked for an immigration clinic when applying to law schools. Her ultimate goal is to work in international human rights law, but she also wanted hands-on client service experience, she says.

Last summer and early this past fall, Bowman did research and advocacy writing while clerking for judges with the United Nations Milosevic trial in The Hague, Netherlands, and the Bagosora trial in Tanzania. It was "really fascinating. I loved it," she says.

Now, at the law center, Bowman is working on a political asylum case for a law center client from Africa. Since these cases move quickly, she "will be able to go through the whole process" with the client, she says, from putting together the country conditions report

needed for the application to attending the client's interview with the U.S. Government.

The client is part of a persecuted group in his home country, says Bowman, in which the government is not taking action against the persecutors. Bowman included information from the State Department, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and newspaper articles in the country conditions report. She also included letters from the client's family and friends, police reports, and hospital reports.

The client's interview is in a few days. Bowman will attend it and ask him questions at the end of the interview to fill in any gaps in the information shared to that point.

The center's law students, under Parker's direct supervision, also work on some deportation defenses, self-petitions for abused women seeking citizenship, U-visas for victims of crime in the United States, and T-visas for victims of human trafficking.

Under the Violence Against Women Act, there is a provision allowing for immigrant women who are being abused by their husbands to apply on their own for citizenship. Usually a spouse's petition is required, but in an abusive relationship, it is often withheld. Women must prove the abuse—which can be done with testimony from neighbors or friends, says Parker—and then can proceed with a self-petition for residence.

T-visas are also relatively new on the immigration scene and benefit those who have

been victims of human trafficking. There is increasing funding to identify victims, says Parker; the law center is now working with the Santa Clara County Anti-Trafficking Task Force on the issue.

A U-visa allows immigrants who are victims of violent crime in the United States to get legal residency status if they are willing to help law enforcement authorities in solving the crime, explains Parker. The provision is part of a law passed in 2000; "it's fairly new," says Parker, "and good for students to learn."

Angela Lytton is working on a U-visa case for a Somali woman who is from a tribe currently being persecuted in that country. If the client is sent back, she could be killed. "That's difficult to deal with," says Lytton. The woman was told to lie by a local on her first asylum application; Lytton is hoping to buttress the U-visa application with the woman's willingness to help authorities in their investigation of the local man.

In another U-visa case, second-year John Nguyen is helping a client who was injured in a drive-by shooting that left him in a wheelchair. "There are a lot of sad stories out there," says Nguyen.

Learning how to interview clients to get the necessary information is a valuable skill he has learned while working at the center, says Nguyen. For clients, it is "hard for them to tell someone they just met their life stories," he says, especially when highly personal details of abuse or suffering may be the information needed to become legal residents.



Helping people who need it so much through the clinic is "invigorating," says Lytton, who will work at the law center full time this summer on a fellowship from the law school. Although many law students secure jobs after graduation with the firms they work in over their second summers, Lytton stands by her choice. "I don't want to do anything I'm not passionate about," she says. It may be "tough financially," she says, but she sticks by her goal of doing immigration or refugee legal services after graduation.